

Distr.: General 29 July 2020

Original: English

Implementation of paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013)

Twenty-seventh report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The present report, submitted pursuant to paragraph 4 of Security Council resolution 2107 (2013), covers developments pertaining to missing Kuwaiti and third-country nationals and missing Kuwaiti property, including the national archives, since my previous report, dated 5 May 2020 (S/2020/358).

II. Recent activities with regard to the repatriation and return of all Kuwaiti and third-country nationals, or their remains

2. The new Government of Iraq, which was sworn in on 7 May, has pledged its resolve and commitment to ascertaining the fate of Kuwaiti missing persons and to making progress with respect to the file on Kuwaiti missing property, as part of its efforts to further strengthen bilateral relations with Kuwait. The newly appointed Prime Minister of Iraq, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, met with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait, Ahmad Nasser al-Mohammed Al-Sabah, during the latter's official visit to Iraq on 14 June. According to an official statement released by the Prime Minister's Office on the same day, the two sides agreed to strengthen their cooperation concerning the file on Kuwaiti missing persons and property, including the return of the remaining Kuwaiti national archives, and affirmed their commitment towards making further progress.

3. On 22 June, my Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs and Electoral Assistance met with the Ambassador of Kuwait to Iraq, Salem al-Zamanan, to review the Kuwaiti missing persons and property file. Mr. Al-Zamanan expressed the desire of Kuwait to strengthen bilateral ties with the new Government of Iraq. He noted that Mr. Al-Sabah had paid his first official visit to Iraq on 14 June in pursuit of that objective. He confirmed that the Minister had discussed the Kuwaiti missing persons and property file with senior Iraqi officials during his visit and had called for the resolution of outstanding issues. Mr. Al-Zamanan commended the work of the Iraqi Ministry of Defence in locating the remains of Kuwaiti missing persons and expressed the expectation of Kuwait for the Ministry continue its activities on the file.

4. Meanwhile, Kuwaiti forensic experts continued the process of reassembling the human remains exhumed in Samawah in March 2019 and transferred from Iraq to





Kuwait in August 2019. Restrictions in Kuwait related to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) further slowed the process during the reporting period.

5. Human remains exhumed in late January 2020 from the al-Shaykhiyah site in the Samawah desert remained securely stored at the Medico-Legal Directorate of the Ministry of Health of Iraq, in Baghdad. Their handover to Kuwait is pending approval by the Prime Minister of Iraq. When conditions allow, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence will make the practical and logistical arrangements necessary to undertake the transfer. My Deputy Special Representative reiterated to the relevant interlocutors the readiness of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to assist in the transportation of the human remains from Iraq to Kuwait at the request of both sides, COVID-19 conditions permitting.

6. There were no meetings of the Technical Subcommittee during the reporting period, owing to border closures and other restrictive measures taken by countries in the region in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tripartite Commission and the Technical Subcommittee postponed meetings planned for 7–9 July in Baghdad and took initial steps to organize a virtual meeting of the Technical Subcommittee.

7. Similarly, planned UNAMI training on the use of the ground penetrating radar method for dedicated staff of the Iraqi Ministry of Defence could not take place during the reporting period owing to the COVID-19 pandemic and was therefore postponed until further notice.

III Recent activities with regard to the return of Kuwaiti property

8. During the reporting period, there were no further developments on the return of Kuwaiti property, including the national archives. Although the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs had planned to hand over to Kuwait in April the previously located Kuwaiti property items, including microfilm and scientific books, the transfer was postponed because of movement restrictions imposed in both countries to counter the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. During the meeting on 22 June with my Deputy Special Representative, Mr. Al-Zamanan underlined the primary importance of the search for the Kuwaiti national archives, which he noted were of enormous symbolic and historical significance and therefore distinct from missing Kuwaiti property items.

IV. Observations

10. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has impeded progress on the important Kuwaiti missing persons and property file, the stated commitment of the new Government of Iraq, led by Prime Minister al-Kadhimi, to resolve all outstanding issues is a positive sign of renewed momentum. The recent official visit by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait to Iraq represents an important step in that regard. It is my sincere hope that, as restrictions are lifted, stakeholders can return to building on recent substantive achievements. Despite the many challenging security developments in Iraq, the Iraqi Ministry of Defence has demonstrated commendable perseverance and focus. I hope that the newly appointed Minister for Defence and his staff will continue that work, in collaboration with Kuwait, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the tripartite mechanism, with a view to achieving tangible progress.

11. ICRC has continued to show determination and innovation in leading and coordinating activities on the Kuwaiti missing persons file in these difficult times, including by finding new ways to exchange information and initiatives in lieu of the regular meetings of the tripartite mechanism. I commend the continued patience and understanding of Kuwait and its efforts to build a constructive working relationship with all parties, including the relevant representatives of the Government of Iraq. It is my hope that this cooperation will yield further advances that would bring a degree of relief to some of the families.

12. UNAMI remains committed to assisting in advancing all aspects of the file, including through its capacity-building initiative. The Mission is looking forward to re-engaging with its counterparts in the tripartite mechanism as soon as circumstances will allow, with a view to making continuous and meaningful progress.
